

to rage around the details of these first campaigns and he has never wholly died away ; pamphleteering biographers striving with one another — some eager to prove that he was a consistent Tory from the beginning, others no less eager to convict him as an unscrupulous time-server, careless of everything but his own advancement. The outlines of the truth will now begin to be apparent. Disraeli in 1832 was impatiently eager to get into Parliament; but his opinions were the opinions of a man in complete isolation from the ordinary schools of political thought and he was almost cynically indifferent to the conventions of party allegiance. Experience soon taught him that this indifference could not be maintained ; he learnt in due course to pay the necessary tribute to convention, and as time went on he acquired some of the freedom which is the privilege of greatness. But in these early days his extreme detachment in the matter of opinion and allegiance was ascribed by the multitude of humdrum politicians to absence of political convictions. That he was without political convictions, however, was the exact opposite of the truth. He was a man overburdened with political convictions, not yet fully elaborated or harmonised into a system, but dear to him as the product of original and independent thought. If he had been content to wear the livery of either party he could with half the energy and ability he showed have speedily forced his way into Parliament. But it was not in his nature to accept a political creed or programme ready made or to stifle the instinct of criticism which was so strong within him. He was a political free-thinker at the beginning of his career as he remained a political free-thinker to the end.

Born in a library and trained from early childhood by learned men who did not share the passions and the prejudices of our political and social life, I had imbibed on some subjects conclusions different from those which generally prevail, and especially with reference to the history of our own country. How an oligarchy had been substituted for a kingdom, and a

